

Literacy and What You Can Do

Literacy is everyone's issue! Everyone can do something to promote literacy and lifelong learning.

As an Individual

- **Be a lifelong learner.** The demands of our society are changing every day, and literacy skills not used on a regular basis do deteriorate. Keep your skills up-to-date.
- **Encourage others to be lifelong learners.** Support your friends, family members, and neighbors who are upgrading their education. If you have developed a relationship of trust with a person who has a literacy problem, your understanding and support may help them join a program, and your ongoing encouragement may help them continue with it.
- **Read with your child.** Studies show that parents are the most important teachers of their children. Early reading experiences provide positive brain development to start a child's life of learning.
- **Volunteer your time in a literacy program in your community.** Many literacy programs depend on volunteer tutors and will provide you with the training and support to work with learners. Some agencies may be looking for community members serve on their board of directors.
- **Donate money.** Literacy programs can only serve a small percentage of the people with literacy needs. More support would allow more people to get the help they need. Most agencies can issue tax receipts for charitable donations.
- **Speak out for literacy.** Let politicians and community leaders know that you think literacy and lifelong learning are important issues in our society.

In Your Community

- **Think about the difficulties faced by people with lower literacy skills.** Make sure people can easily find their way around your business, school or agency. Be selective in how and where you use signs, notices and any displays of printed materials. Arrange them so that the most important messages stand out clearly.
- **Make help available without singling people out.** Simply ask "Would you like me to fill that out with you, or would you prefer to do it yourself?" rather than "can you read?"
- **Do a "literacy audit"** to identify and address the barriers that your organization may be presenting to people with low literacy skills. For a sample audit checklist, contact the Literacy Alberta 403- 410-6990 or www.literacy-alberta.ca/
- **Make literacy an issue and a priority** at your staff and/or Board meetings.
- **Build links with literacy partners in your community.** Look under "Learn" in the yellow pages to find the literacy groups in your community. Invite speakers from literacy groups to speak to your group.
- **Meet with literacy groups** to discuss ways that your organization might work together or even develop partnerships. Discover and discuss where your concerns and interests overlap. Ask literacy workers for their advice on the best ways for you to communicate with less literate people so that your business or service becomes more accessible.

As an Employer

- **Give your employees information about learning opportunities.**
- **Make sure your employees have access to opportunities to improve their skills.** Consider providing literacy training on-site. If this is not feasible, consider bringing in adult educators for occasional on-site training, or joining forces with other businesses to offer classes. Provide incentives such as paid release time and financial support for tuition costs.
- **Support family-friendly policies for education.** Allow employees paid leave time for parent-teacher interviews and other school-related activities.
- **Sponsor or support a literacy program** in your community. Donate money so that programs can serve more people.
- **Donate equipment.** If your office is getting a new copier, fax machine, computer, or furniture, consider giving the old equipment to a literacy program.
- **Donate in-kind services** such as free printing, legal advice or the use of your conference room.
- **Consider volunteering,** and encourage your employees to do the same.
- **Become an advocate for literacy** within your business or organization.

As a Political or Community Leader

- **Visit a literacy organization.** Get to know the local literacy practitioners and learners to find out what the literacy issues are in your community.
- **Publish articles about lifelong learning** or literacy success stories in your constituency news bulletin or newspaper column. Feature learners, volunteers, instructors, and/or programs.
- **Help literacy agencies to provide recognition** to staff, learners, volunteers and donors by sending thank you notes, congratulations cards or certificates.
- **Create discussion.** Make literacy and lifelong learning the focus of community forums, round-tables meetings, radio call-in shows or cable-TV programs.
- **Become an example of effective clear language** in all your written and spoken communications.
- **Speak out** in support of a national lifelong learning agenda that includes literacy. Find out what is happening about public support for literacy and lifelong learning by checking MCL's website at www.literacy.ca. Add your support and participation to MCL's annual Literacy Action Day and other initiatives.

As a Government Department



- **Encourage awareness and sensitivity towards less literate people.** Ask your department to consider the literacy levels of the client population when they serve the public. Ensure that staff are aware of different learning styles and learning disabilities. Remember these are often a hidden issue.
- **Use clear language consistently** in written and verbal communications. Provide workshops to teach staff clear language communication techniques.
- **Do focus tests of your materials** with real people who have low literacy skills. Monitor how well you are communicating.
- **Promote literacy and lifelong learning.** Devote an issue of the departmental newsletter to literacy and lifelong learning. Emphasize the benefits of improved literacy skills in the workplace. Celebrate the lifelong learning successes of employees who have improved their literacy levels or who upgraded their education in any way.
- **Provide recognition** for employees who are literacy volunteers.
- **Encourage staff to achieve their personal and professional goals.** Provide seminars or career counselling on the full range of learning opportunities and training leaves available.

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